

WHEN PEOPLE REBEL

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INTRODUCTION

◆ Nature of the Revolt 1857

Revolt of 1857 is often termed as the First War of Independence because for the first time in Indian history different segments of the Indian society stood up against a common enemy, that was the British.

Why did such a revolt start in India ?

What led this revolt ?

What were its results ?

Let us take a look at the causes and consequences. The revolt of 1857 was the result and the culmination of popular discontent and a clear

aggression of resistance against the exploitation and oppressive policy of the British in India.

British ruled India for about 100 years from 1757 till 1857. The British rule created dissatisfaction and distrust among the masses which led to outbreaks and continuous uprisings in different parts of the country. In 1857, a major revolt occurred which shook the very foundation of British rule. It had vast participation of peasants, craftsmen, soldiers, artisans, nobles and rulers.

Let us learn more about the causes behind this revolt. The revolt of 1857 is also termed as **Sepoy Mutiny** by the British. Some Indian historians call it the **First War of Independence**.

However, the British writers like Sir James Outram and P.E. Roberts say that the mutiny was started due to the introduction of greased cartridges. They describe the events as concentrated revolt of Indians and a fight between civilised and uncivilised people. The British Governor General Disraeli called it as a **National Revolt** and the participants were united by one common feature that is hatred towards Britishers.

CAUSES OF THE REVOLT OF 1857

◆ Political Causes

- ◆ **Imperial Policy of British** : All British rulers from Robert Clive to Lord Dalhousie, followed an expansionist policy annexing Indian states into British Empire either by use of force or treachery. It gave rise to resentment among the native rulers which culminated in the 1857 uprising.

- ◆ **Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse :** Lord Dalhousie was highly ambitious pro-imperialist. Under his Doctrine of Lapse, any ruler who did not have a natural heir to the throne would have to forfeit the right to rule for his future generation, led to the annexation of states like Satara, Nagpur, Jhansi, Sambhalpur, Udaipur, Jaipur and Baghat. It raised a wave of discontentment against the British rule.
- ◆ **Abolition of Pensions and Titles :** Lord Dalhousie denied the pensions and titles to heirs of many Indian rulers. The pension and title of rulers of Karnataka and Tanjore was abolished while Nana Saheb, the adopted son of Baji Rao II was denied the title and pension after the Peshwa's death. As a result he became the sworn enemy of the British
- ◆ **Annexation of Awadh :** In 1856, Lord Dalhousie annexed Awadh on grounds of maladministration. Nawab Wajad Ali Shah was sent to Calcutta on annual pension of Rs.12 lakh. Thousands of courtiers, nobles and officials lost their job. The jagirs of about 21,000 taluqdars were taken away. As a result a lot of discontentment spread against the British in Awadh.
- ◆ **Disrespect of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Mughal Emperor :** Lord Hastings stopped the custom of presenting gifts to the Mughal emperor and later his name was removed from the coins. Lord Dalhousie even chalked out a plan to deprive him of his fort and kingship. This turned Muslims, who regarded Mughal emperor in high esteem, against the British.
- ◆ **Blow to Aristocracy :** Gradual disappearance of native states made many people like scholars, artists, sculptors, fakirs and preachers unemployed. These were patronised by rulers of native states. The condition of this class became pathetic, giving rise to anti-British sentiments.
- ◆ **Administrative Causes**
- ◆ **Alien Rule :** India was ruled by administrators thousands of miles away in London. They were ignorant about the beliefs and customs of India. As a result they could neither establish proximity with the Indian masses nor could they win their hearts
- ◆ **British Judicial System :** The new judicial system introduced by the British was improper and partial. Rich and resourceful people were able to manipulate judgments in their favour. It led to dissatisfaction among the common man.
- ◆ **Indians were Excluded from High Posts :** Indians were not given high posts in civil services and military. The highest rank in military was that of a Subedar while in civil services, they got promoted only to the post of 'Sadar Amin'. This turned the Indians against the British.
- ◆ **Lack of representation in Legislative Council :** All the members of the Imperial Legislative Council were British. They were not well acquainted with traditions, beliefs and problems of India. They forced laws on Indians without caring for their feelings. This infuriated the Indians against the British administration.
- ◆ **Economic Causes :**
- ◆ **Drain of Wealth :** The British remained foreign merchants. Their main motive was to return home amassing maximum money through wages, gifts and presents. One-third of the total revenue of the country was spent on salaries of British officials. A huge amount was sent to England as pension of retired British officials. This immense draining of wealth headed the country towards poverty and deprivation
- ◆ **Destruction of Indian Industries, Trade and Commerce :** The British administrators put

Indian economy at stake in order to protect their own economic interests. British economic policies resulted in Indian markets being flooded with British products depriving Indian masses of their sources of livelihood.

- ◆ **Exorbitant Rate of Land Revenue :** High land revenue which amounted to more than one-half of the farmer's produce under the British East India company, the harsh methods of collection of revenue and the law of eviction in case of non-payment of revenue pushed the farmers towards poverty, deprivation and starvation. Between 1770-1857, India witnessed 12 famines leading to deaths of millions of people.

- ◆ **Resumption of Rest-free Lands:** In order to increase income of the company, Governor General Lord William Bentick ordered the survey of all jagirs which had been gifted by Indian rulers. Jagirs who could not produce enough documentary proofs were deprived of their jagirs or made to pay a huge land revenue. The Indian Commission appointed in 1852 to investigate property rights of land owners, confiscated the jagirdari of 21,000 hereditary jagirs in a span of 5 years. It led to discontentment among landlords.

- ◆ **Rising Poverty and Unemployment :** By 1857, economic condition of Indian masses became pathetic due to economic policies of British administrators. People were unable to satisfy even their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Such people joined the ranks of rebels.

◆ **Social and Religious Causes :**

- ◆ **Maltreatment of Indians :** British treated Indians as inferior and uncivilised. Indians could neither go to their clubs nor travel with them. They were not appointed to high posts even on the basis of their merit. This maltreatment turned Indians against the British.

- ◆ **Interference in Social Life :** Humane British officers like Lord William Bentick started making efforts to weed out evils from Indian society like Sati, human sacrifice, etc. Even Lord Dalhousie banned female infanticide and legalised widow remarriage. Indians thought that British were interfering in their social life trying to convert them into Christianity and destroy Indian culture. This turned them against the British administration

- ◆ **Spread of Western Education :** The British started imparting education in western knowledge and science through English. Under the new system, students belonging to different castes and communities studied under one roof without any discrimination. The Indians were convinced that British wanted to convert Indian youth to Christianity

- ◆ **Propagation of Christianity :** An important cause of propagation of Christianity was the propagation by the Christian missionaries. The English missionaries criticised Indian religion while preaching Christianity. The study of the Bible was made compulsory for the mission schools. This aroused a sense of fear and suspicion among the Indian masses and they began to think that the government wanted to destroy their religion by converting them to Christianity

◆ **Military Causes**

- ◆ **Unrest among the Indian Soldiers:** The Indian soldiers recruited in the company's army were an inseparable part of the Indian society. Like the common masses, they too were hurt by the drain of wealth, economic exploitation, destruction of Indian industries, trade and commerce, spread of English education, propagation of Christianity and

unnecessary interference in socio-religious matters of the Indians. The British officials interfered in personal lives of the Indian soldiers. This led to discontentment among Indian sepoy and they rebelled.

- ◆ **Low Salary and Allowances to Indian Soldiers:** The Indian soldiers were deprived of salary and allowances given to their British counterparts even after 30 years of loyal service. The British high officials turned a deaf ear to the frequent requests of Indian soldiers to increase their salaries and allowances.
- ◆ **Disrespectful Attitude towards Indian Soldiers :** The Indian soldiers were shown disrespect. They were placed in front rows in the battle. They made maximum sacrifice but the credit went to British officers and soldiers. This became a major cause of sepoy mutiny
- ◆ **Resentment among Troops of Awadh :** The annexation of Awadh in 1856 caused widespread dissatisfaction among the soldiers of Bengal; about 75,000 of whom belonged to Awadh. The British did not destroy the forts of Awadh. Consequently, the soldiers of Awadh prepared themselves to wage a war against the British
- ◆ **Military Failure of British :** The British faced defeats on many fronts. These included the first Sikh War (1845-46), second Anglo- Sikh War (1848-49), and the first Afghan War (1838-1842). The British victory in Crimean War (1854-56) was also not respectable. All these events shattered the conviction that British were invincible.
- ◆ **General Service Enlistment Act :** In 1856, during Lord Canning's Governor-Generalship, the General Service Enlistment Act was passed. Under this every new recruit had to serve anywhere in India or overseas. According to religious beliefs of Hindus, crossing the sea was liable to destroy one's caste and religion. Hence, it

caused strong discontentment among the high caste Hindus.

◆ **Immediate Cause**

- ◆ The Enfield rifle was introduced in the army in 1856. The cartridges were smeared with grease and covered with caps which had to be taken off before use. The sepoy believed that the grease was made of cow and pig fat and they refused to use them since it hurted religious sentiments of Hindus and Muslims.
- ◆ On 29th March 1857, **Mangal Pandey** called the other sepoy to react at Barrackpore. He was arrested and hanged on 8th April 1857
- ◆ On 9th March 1857, 85 soldiers at Meerut protested to use the cartridges and they were sentenced for 10 years imprisonment. The sepoy set fire to the British houses and killed the British men, women and children. Some proceeded towards Delhi
- ◆ The sepoy of Meerut rode all night of 10 May to reach Delhi in the early hours next morning. As news of their arrival spread. the regiments stationed in Delhi also rose up in rebellion. Triumphant soldiers gathered around the wall of the Red Fort where the Badsha lived, demanding in meet him. They forced their way into the palace and proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar as their leader. The sepoy of Meerut rode all night of 10 May to reach Delhi in the early hours next morning. As news of their arrival spread, the regiments stationed in Delhi also rose up in rebellion. Again British officers were killed arms and ammunition seized, building set on fire.
- ◆ The ageing emperor wrote letters to all the chiefs and rulers of the country to come forward and organise a confederacy of Indian states to fight the

British. This step taken by Bahadur Shah had great implications. Threatened by the expansion of British rule, many of the smaller ruler and chieftains felt that if the Mughal emperor could rule again, they too would be able to rule their own territories once more, under Mughal authority.

- ◆ Bahadur Shah Zafar's decision to bless the rebellion changed the entire situation dramatically. Often when people see an alternative possibility they felt inspired and enthused. It gave them the courage, hope and confidence to act.

▶ THE EVENT OF 1857-1858 (THE BEGINNING OF THE UPRISING)

How to Mutiny Began

The uprising of 1857 began at Barrackpur in Bengal. On 28th March, 1857, a sepoy named Mangal Pandey asked his fellow soldiers to refuse to use the greased cartridges. Sergeant Hudson and Lt. Vag tried to capture Mangal Pandey, but he shot down both of them. Mangal Pandey was captured by other British officers. He was hanged on 8th April, 1857 for revolting single handed and attacking his superior officers. Mangal Pandey was the first martyr of the freedom struggle. The regiment was disarmed and disbanded. The sepoys now marched towards Meerut.

◆ **Meerut :**

On 9th May, in the same year, 85 sepoys of the Native Cavalry at Meerut refused to use the greased cartridges. They were court marshalled and sentenced to eight to ten years of imprisonment. This sparked off a general rising among the Indian soldiers stationed at Meerut. They raised the slogans of "Har Har Mahadev" and "Kill the Firangis." On 10th May, they got

released their imprisoned comrades, killed their officers and raised the banner of revolt. Next day, as if driven by a magnet, they marched to Delhi after sunset.

◆ **Delhi :**

The rebel sepoys from Meerut arrived at the gates of Red Fort early in the morning on 11 May. It was a Ramzan day and the Old Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah had just finished his prayers and meals. He heard the sepoys raising slogans "Victory to Bahadur Shah" with great zeal. They had gathered under his window. They told Bahadur Shah, "We have come from Meerut after killing all the Englishmen there." Another group of sepoys also entered Delhi. The ordinary people also joined them. The local infantry joined them and killed their European officers and occupied the city. The rebellious soldiers proclaimed Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of India and unfurled the Mughal banner. Some British soldiers under the command of General Willoughby offered some resistance to the rebels but they were miserably defeated. For some days, the rebels ruthlessly massacred Englishmen.

Shah Mal who lived in a large village of Barout in Uttar Pradesh, belonged to a class of Jat cultivators, mobilised the headman and cultivators of chaurasi des (84 villages) and urged them to rebel against the British. He sent supplies to the sepoys who had mutined in Delhi and stopped all official communication between British headquarters and Meerut. Shah Mal took over the bungalow of an English officer and turned it into a 'Hall of Justice' settling disputes and dispensing judgements. For a period, the people felt that Firangi Raj was over and their Raj had come. Shah Mal was killed in a battle in July 1857.

When the news of the occupation of Delhi by the rebels spread in the country, there were risings at

Lucknow, Aligarh, Benaras, Rohilkhand, etc. The soldiers from these centres also marched to Delhi

◆ **Siege of Delhi :**

Lord Canning, the Governor General, sent a large force to suppress the Uprising. He also asked the native rulers to send him military assistance. The government set up Espionage Department and spread rumours to create dissensions between the Hindus and the Muslims. After receiving military help from the rulers of Hyderabad, Gwalior, Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Nepal etc. The British commander in chief, Henry Bernard Wilson, laid a siege to Delhi. The British troops occupied Delhi on 14th September, 1857 after fighting for three months, but the British commander, Nicholson, was killed in the battlefield. The Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II was taken prisoner. His two sons were shot dead before his eyes. The aged Bahadur Shah II was tried and exiled to Rangoon where he died in 1862. Thus the rule of the great Mughal dynasty finally came to an end.

◆ **Kanpur :**

The leader of the revolt at Kanpur was Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II, the last Maratha Peshwa. He had occupied Kanpur in the first week of June and had declared himself as the Peshwa. Mr. Wheeler, the British commander of the fort of Kanpur, had surrendered after offering some resistance. Nana Sahib had assured the Englishmen that he would transport them safely by boat to Allahabad. But when the Englishmen started boarding the boat at Sati Chora Ghatt, some Indian soldiers got enraged to hear the news of the atrocities committed by General Neill at Allahabad and Benaras and attacked the British soldiers. They massacred a

large number of British men. Only four British soldiers managed to reach Allahabad safely. The Indian soldiers had not attacked the British soldiers on the orders of Nana Sahib. He rather took 125 women and children under his safe custody. Later, these women and children were killed at Bibigarh and their dead bodies were thrown into a well.

Finally, General Havlok, General Neill and General Campbell crushed the rebels and reoccupied Kanpur. Nana Sahib, being disappointed, fled to the forests of Nepal and was never heard of again. Tantia Tope, one of his most loyal servants, went to Jhansi and joined Rani Lakshmi Bai

◆ **Lucknow :**

Dr. Ishwari Prasad observes that probably nowhere the revolt was as well-organised as in Awadh. In organising this revolt, Wajid Ali Shah's Begum, Hazrat Mahal; Maulwa Ahmed Shah of Faizaber, Raja Man Singh, the Taluqdar of Shahgunj and Raja Hanumat Singh played prominent part. The civilians and soldiers of Awadh rose in favour of the Nawab of Awadh. The attempt of Chief Commissioner Henry Lawrence to stem the tide, by exciting the Hindus and Muslims against each other, having failed, he reorganised the defence of Macchi Bhavan and the Residency where Englishmen and women were to take shelter in case of emergency.

On the night of 30th May, 1857, a cannon boomed in the cantonment of Lucknow - the pre-

arranged signal of revolt. Immediately massacre of Englishmen, burning of their houses and the hoisting of the green flag of Emperor Bahadur Shah began. The revolt was led by the Begum of Awadh who had declared her young son Bijjis Kadar as the Nawab of Awadh. Soon the rising assumed the shape of a popular revolt. The sepoy of Lucknow, the Zamindars and the peasants of Awadh and the Begum organised an all-out attack on the British. They freed the whole of Awadh in a few days. The British General, Henry Lawrence, along with his 1000 British and 700 Indian sepoy, had to take shelter in the British Residency building at Lucknow. On first July 1857, the rebels besieged the Residency building. Henry Lawrence, the commander of the British army, was struck by a cannon ball and died. But the besieged British soldiers continued fighting against the rebels. In June 1857, General Neill captured Allahabad. Neill and Havelock now proceeded further towards Lucknow but they had to fight against the rebels at Kanpur before reaching Lucknow. After occupying Kanpur, they marched towards Lucknow. They defeated the rebels and besieged the Residency to rescue the British soldiers. But Neill was killed by the rebels in a street of Lucknow. Although Havelock reached the Residency, they continued the siege of the building. He realised that it was difficult for him to fight against the rebels who were larger in number, so he began to wait for reinforcements from Allahabad.

Campbell, who had newly been appointed the commander-in-chief of the army, marched with a

large army to help Havelock. The forces of Campbell and Havelock besieged the rebels. A terrible fight continued between the British forces and the rebels in the streets of Lucknow for many days. Ultimately, the rebels had to lift the siege of the Residency but they continued to occupy a large part of the city of Lucknow. Havelock died on 24th September and Campbell remained busy in the conquest to Kanpur till the first week of December.

In December 1857, Campbell received reinforcements which increased his strength. In February 1858, a large British army marched from Kanpur to Lucknow. Outram had already reached Alam Bagh with 4000 soldiers. The troops of both the commanders completely routed the rebels. The British now occupied the whole city of Lucknow. The loss of Lucknow broke the backbone of the rebels.

◆ **Benaras and Allahabad :**

After the rebels had captured Delhi, the uprising spread to Allahabad and Benaras. General Neill was sent to crush the revolt. He attacked the rebels with the help of Sikh and Madras regiments. Neill occupied Benaras before the rebels could occupy it. The British massacred thousands of rebels, women and children. From Benaras, Neill proceeded to Allahabad. On his way, he massacred thousands of innocent people. He occupied Allahabad on 18th June.

◆ **Central India, Jhansi and Gwalior :**

Jhansi and Gwalior were the main centres of revolt in Central India. Rani Lakshmi Bai, the widow of Raja Ganga Dhar Rai, rose in revolt in Jhansi and led the rebels. In June 1857, she fought against the British like a true heroine with bravery, courage and military skill and drove away the British after a fierce battle and established her rule over Jhansi. Tantia Tope, after the loss of Kanpur, came to Jhansi and joined Lakshmi Bai.

In April 1858, the British troops under the command of Sir Hugh Rose invaded Jhansi, Rani Laxmi Bai was joined by Tantia Tope. Both of them fought battles against the British but were defeated after a tough fight. In May, the British occupied Kalpi. Tantia Tope and the Rani now left for Gwalior. They hoped that the Scindhiya ruler of Gwalior would come to their help. But the Scindhiya refused to join them. The Scindhiya rather made preparations to fight against the Rani and Tantia Tope. But he was defeated by the Rani's troops, and one of his ministers, Dinkar, escaped to Agra and took shelter with the British. In this way, Lakshmi Bai got the opportunity to occupy Gwalior in June 1858. Now the British commander Hugh Rose, along with the Scindhiya, invaded Gwalior. On June 11, there took place a fierce battle between the opponents. The Rani died fighting on June 17 in the battle dress of a soldier mounted on a charger. On June 20, Tantia Tope left Gwalior and escaped to the South. The British followed him and captured him. Tantia Tope was hanged to death on 18th April, 1859.

◆ **Bareilly and Shahjahanpur :**

At Bareilly, the revolt was led by Khan Bahadur Khan. He was joined by Maulvi Ahmed Ullah Shah of Faizabad. In May, 1858, the British Commander Campbell crushed the rebellion and occupied Bareilly. Maulvi Ahmed Ullah Shah ran away to Shahjahanpur. Campbell followed the Maulvi and defeated him. The Maulvi escaped to Awadh. But he was murdered through a conspiracy hatched by a brother of Raja Jagan Nath Singh in June 1858.

Maulvi Ahmed Ullah Shah was one of the many Maulvis who played an important role in the uprising of 1857. He was popularly called Danka Shah. He fought in the famous battle of Chinhat in which the British forces under Henry Lawrence were defeated. Many people said that he had magical power and could not be killed by the British. This belief formed the basis of his authority.

◆ **Bihar :**

Kunwar Singh, a discontented Zamindar of Jagdishpur, was the chief organiser of the revolt in Bihar. Though 80 years old, he was an outstanding military leader and strategist of the revolt. He adopted guerrilla tactics of warfare and killed several Europeans on whom he could lay his hands. He later joined hands with Nana Sahib's forces. He also campaigned in Awadh and Central India. Racing back to Bihar, he defeated the British forces at Arrah. But this proved to be his last battle. He died in April 1858 after sustaining a fatal injury. The fighting continued in

Bihar under the leadership of his brother Amar Singh till the end of December 1859.

◆ **South India :**

South India also did not remain unaffected by the uprising. There were occurrences of revolts in the present day Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Even Goa and Pondicherry did not remain unaffected. There were rising of the people and the soldiers at about 20 places in Maharashtra. The leader of the rebels in this region was Ranga Bapuji Gupte. A number of persons were arrested and sentenced to jail in Andaman. Mansingh Rajput was hanged in public on June 29, 1858.

In Andhra Pradesh, the major centres of revolt were the coastal areas from Vishakhapatnam to Nellore along with Hyderabad, Rajahmundry, Kurnool, Guntur and Kadappa.

In Tamil Nadu, the major centres of revolt were Chengalpet (near Chennai), North Arcot, Salem, Thanjavur, Madurai, Coimbatore and Tiruchirapalli.

In June 1857, the First Infantry Battalion refused to move from Madras (Chennai). In September 1858, Kunda Swami Mudali murdered some European employees at Salem.

In Kerala, the revolt took place especially in Travancore. The soldiers and local people forced open the grain shops. The government arrested 20 soldiers. The revolt continued till 1859.

◆ **Other Places :**

Punjab was also not all peaceful. The Hindustani sepoys at Mianmir Cantt near Lahore rose in revolt but they were severely crushed. There were small risings in south-eastern Punjab (now called Haryana). Here the rebels were led by Nahar Singh of Balabgarh, Abdul Rahim Khan, the Nawab of Jhajjar and Rao Tula Ram of Rewari. Of these leaders, the first two were hanged, while the third escaped to Kabul where he spent the rest of his life

➤ **CAUSES OF FAILURE OF INDIAN AND SUCCESS OF THE BRITISH**

◆ **Breaking out before Fixed Date :**

The date fixed for revolt was 31 May but hanging of Mangal Pandey (April 8, 1857) made the revolt to break on May 10. The whole plan became disorganised and rebels failed to push it systematically with their full force.

◆ **Cooperation of Native State with the British :**

Only one per cent of Indian rulers took part in the revolt. The rulers' of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Sarhind, Gwalior, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Rajasthan, Baroda and Kashmir showed their complete loyalty to British and gave them logistical support. It became easy for British to win against rebel Indian states

◆ **Lack of Cooperation of Elite :**

Most of the elites, middle class and merchant class did not support the rebels, as the rebel rulers had imposed taxes on them to raise money. Further the educated class believed that India could progress under the British rule.

◆ **Limited Resources of the Rebels :**

The rebels had limited stock of ammunitions and other logistical resources making it easier for British to defeat them.

◆ **Incompetent Leadership :**

Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was too old to lead the revolt. Others leaders like Rani Laxmi Bai, Tantia Tope, Nana Saheb, etc. led bravely but failed to prove themselves as good and able general.

◆ **Competent British Generals :**

From the beginning, the British were led by competent generals. John Lawrence did not allow the revolt to spread in Punjab and Wilson and Nicolson showed courage in recapturing Delhi. Hugh Rose defeated the huge armies of Rani Laxmi Bai and Tantia Tope while Havelock routed troops of Nana Sahib. Likewise, with extraordinary courage, General Neill, Havelock and Campbell curbed the rebellion in Awadh.



INTERPRETATIONS OF THE EVENTS OF 1857

There is a controversy among the scholars about the nature of the revolt of 1857. Perhaps,

there is no other event in the history of India about the nature of which so many divergent views have been expressed. Some Indian historians are of the view that it was a Muslim organised revolt against Christianity.

◆ **First View – It was a Sepoy Mutiny**

Most of the European writers hold that it was essentially a military rising. John Lawrence, John Seeley, Charles Raikes, Kaye, Malleson and Syed Ahmed Khan gave the following arguments in support of their view.

- ◆ There were many military causes of the revolt. The Indian sepoy were looked upon with contempt by the English officers. They received very meagre salaries and allowances. Their religious sentiments were injured. All this sparked off a general mutiny of the Indian soldiers.
- ◆ The main cause of the revolt was the issue of the use of greased cartridges. When the British officers ordered the troops to use the cartridges tipped with the fat of pigs and cows, they refused to do so. It hurt the religious sentiments of the soldiers and they rose in revolt against the British.
- ◆ The revolt was first started everywhere by the dissatisfied and disgruntled soldiers. They were led by discontented native rulers. For example, the sepoy first rose in revolt in March-April, 1857 at Barackpur. At Meerut also, the sepoy

first started the revolt on 10th May and then proceeded to Delhi. Then it became a general revolt at Delhi. In this connection, John Lawrence wrote, "It is my decided impression that the mutiny had its origin in the army itself but was simply taken advantage of by the disaffected persons in the country to compass their own needs."

- ◆ The rebels had no support of the common people. At some places, the sepoys looted even the common people. They had, therefore, no sympathy for the rebels. John Seeley holds that it was a wholly unpatriotic and selfish sepoy mutiny with no native leadership and no popular support.
- ◆ The revolt was confined mainly to some parts of India such as Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Central India. There was not much effect of the revolt on Punjab, Sindh and South India. On the other hand, some of these regions helped the British in suppressing the revolt.
- ◆ Only a few contingents of the sepoys rose in revolt. The Sikh, the Rajput and the Gurkha regiments took no part in the rebellion. They rather helped the British in suppressing the revolt.
- ◆ All the native rulers of India did not join the revolt. But only those who had personal grievances against the British rule joined the revolt. For instance, Nana Sahib was refused pension. Rani Laxmi Bai or Jhansi ki Rani was

not allowed to install her adopted son on the throne after the death of her husband. Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II was informed that his successors would not be allowed to use the historic Red Fort. Thus only those rulers led the revolt who were dissatisfied with the British.

- ◆ But some other writers do not agree with the view that it was only a sepoy mutiny. No doubt, the above causes instigated the Sepoys to revolt, but there were other political, social and economic causes of the revolt as well. Not only the sepoys but Nana Sahib, Bahadur Shah, Lakshmi Bai, Ahmed Shah and many other rulers and prominent persons also took active part in the revolt. It was due to them that the revolt took such a formidable form. Had it been only a Sepoy mutiny, it would not have lasted so long.

◆ **Second View**

Organised Hindu - Muslim Uprising (First War of Indian Independence).

According to James Outram, the Mutiny of 1857 was the result of a joint conspiracy hatched by the Hindus and the Muslims. Kaye and Malleon regard it as an organised rebellion. Vir Savarker and Ashok Mehta hold that it was the "First War of Indian Independence". It was the first really large scale popular outbreak against the British rule. It was a national revolt against slavery. Pandit Nehru in his work

'Discovery of India' writes that the Great Rising of 1857 had some nationalist elements in it.

- ◆ **All the Sections of Indian Society joined the Revolt :** All the sections of Indian society took part in the revolt. Besides the Indian soldiers, the native rulers and the Nawabs, the Muslims, the Hindus, the rich and the poor all helped the rebels. The prominent leaders of the revolt were Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah, Zeenat Mahal, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Nana Sahib, Tantia Tope and Kunwar Singh. The powerful Taluqdars like Raja Man Singh and Raja Hanumant Singh and the eminent Muslim leaders like Maulvi Ahmed Shah also joined the uprising. Ashok Mehta remarks, "Hindus and Muslims worked together, their blood flowed to intermingle, and differences were forgotten." It is thus evident that it was not only a sepoy mutiny but also a national revolt.
- ◆ **Role of Women:** The Indian women also participated in the revolt. At some places, women inspired the rebels to fight against the enemy. They also fought side by side with men in the battles. The best example of their contribution to the national revolt was that of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi who laid down her life fighting in the battlefield
- ◆ **The Leaders were not Motivated by Selfish Interests :** It is incorrect to say that all the leaders of the revolt were motivated by selfish interests. For instance, Emperor Bahadur Shah

II, in his letter to the Rajput chiefs, wrote that the Firangis must be turned out of India and the whole of Hindustan should become free of their rule. If a leader unites all the rebel leaders under one banner he would hand over all the powers to a confederacy of Indian rulers. During the revolt, Bahadur Shah II moved in the streets of Delhi assuring everyone that the war was against the British and no community of India should have any fear. Similarly, Tantia Tope did not join the revolt for any selfish interest but to free his countrymen from the foreign rule.

- ◆ **The Revolt was Pre-planned :** The revolt was planned many months before it actually took place. The patriotic native soldiers disguised as Sadhus were roaming about in the cantonments to incite the soldiers to be ready for revolt. The historians point to the circulation of chapatis and lotuses and propaganda by the Sanyasis and Faquirs and the Mandlis. It is said that many of the regiments of Indian sepoys were carefully linked in a secret organisation which had fixed May 31, 1857 as the day of rising. Had it been only a sepoy mutiny, it would not have been planned.
- ◆ **Long Standing Grievances of the Indians:** The European historians hold that only the question of greased cartridges was the cause of the revolt. But actually, the Indian public opinion was influenced by many social, economic and political factors right from the

time the British came to India. The greased cartridges episode was only a spark which ignited the material that had been accumulating for a long time. It gave an opportunity to the Indians to free their country from the foreign rule. They came to the help the army when it rose to achieve the mission.

- ◆ **National Awakening was Emerging :** The spirit of national awakening was emerging in the country at the time of the uprising but due to lack of adequate means of transport and communication, it was not easy for the people to organise themselves in a short span of time. So the mutiny could not spread in the whole of the country. As the revolt had occurred before the fixed dates, it could not spread to some important parts of India. The revolt was suppressed soon after it broke out. Otherwise it would have spread in the whole of India.

◆ **Third View-Muslim-Organised Revolt :**

James Outram and some other historians hold that the Revolt of 1857 was a Muslim organised revolt but it took advantage of the dissatisfaction of the Hindus with the British rule. The view does not hold much ground. Had this revolt been organised only by one community, the people of other communities would not have joined it. In fact, all the sections of the Indian society combined to rise against the foreign rule. Dr. Ashok Mehta remarks, "Hindus and Muslims worked together, their blood flowed to intermingle, all differences were forgotten."